



June 8, 2007

Dear Senator/Representative:

On behalf of the National Education Association's (NEA) 3.2 million members, we would like to express our opposition to any extension of Trade Promotion Authority, commonly known as “Fast Track.” NEA supports international trade in principle, but we have grave concerns about the ways in which this authority has been utilized. We support public input and congressional consultation during the negotiation and ratification of international trade agreements, and we believe that fast track authority has been used to avoid the necessary levels of input.

NEA strongly supports the inclusion in all trade agreements of social charters that guarantee high standards and systems of checks and balances for any international trade body whose decisions could erode democratic, human rights, environmental, or union protection. These more general concerns about fast track are reinforced by the potential impact of ongoing GATS negotiations on public education.

NEA has been concerned about these issues for some years now and has been working closely through Education International, the global union federation for the educational sector. In August 2006, we wrote to the U.S. Trade Representative requesting that she “withdraw the higher education sector from the U.S. GATS ‘offer.’” Her October 24, 2006 reply, reiterating her commitment “to promoting higher education services in our GATS negotiations” served notice that we hold diametrically opposed views on the nature of higher education, and the consequent implications for trade policy.

NEA strongly believes that education is a basic right. As a result, we urge the government not to initiate, expand, or extend commitments in trade agreements before developing protections that:

- Promote education as a human right and public good, not a commodity for sale;
- Protect the academic freedom, working conditions, and rights of higher education faculty and staff;
- Respect cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as promote equality within and between nations;
- Preserve the ability of governments to regulate in the public interest with the goal of maintaining and expanding public education; and
- Establish rules governing international education that are based on educational, not commercial, objectives.

Subjecting higher education to WTO jurisdiction, which current proposals do, would place at risk a multitude of important higher education policies, such as subsidies, scholarships, and loans. These policies could be challenged as “barriers to trade” on numerous grounds in WTO trade tribunals. The replacement of experience for academic qualifications does not ensure a quality workforce in the provision of educational services. To subject higher education to WTO jurisdiction without a thorough review by relevant policymakers within state and federal governments would be a serious error with devastating consequences. It is important to note that once signed, the binding terms of the GATS make it prohibitively difficult to “take back” sectors from WTO jurisdiction.

The higher educational system in the United States has benefited greatly from our unique blend of federal and state oversight. This process has created a higher education system that is the envy of the world. We do not need WTO trade tribunals second-guessing U.S. lawmakers and regulators in closed trade tribunals.

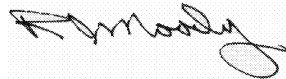
Recent developments in individual bilateral trade agreements only emphasize the importance of allowing the fast track authority to expire, thus allowing trade agreements to be thoroughly examined on a case by case basis, with appropriate public input and congressional consultation during the negotiation and ratification process.

We urge the Congress to reject any extension of Trade Promotion Authority known as "Fast Track."

Sincerely,



Diane Shust
Director of Government Relations



Randall Moody
Manager of Federal Advocacy